

A VIEW OF THE  
PRINCIPLES AND CONDUCT  
OF THE  
Protestant Dissenters,

WITH RESPECT TO THE  
CIVIL AND ECCLESIASTICAL  
Constitution of England.

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By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL. D. F. R. S.

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THE SECOND EDITION.

*Call no man master upon earth; for one is your master, even  
Christ.*

JESUS.

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L O N D O N:

Printed for JOSEPH JOHNSON, No. 44,  
Pater-noster-Row.

Price One Shilling and Six-pence.

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P R E F A C E.

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brethren. With persons who are at all acquainted with the Dissenters in this country, they will easily stand exculpated; it being well known, that they are so widely distant from one another in sentiment, views, and situation, that it is almost impossible for them to act in concert in any thing.

THE principles and conduct of the Dissenters having, of late, been pretty much the subject of conversation, and it being evident that very few persons knew any thing about the matter, or had any easy method of informing themselves concerning it; I imagined, that I should do an acceptable piece of service, both to Dissenters and others, by freely communicating what intelligence I was master of upon the subject. I have descended to no particulars concerning the religious principles of the different sects of Dissenters, because my views in writing do not require it. In what I have said, I am by  
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and good people in the world.

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## 6 THE PREFACE:

have, every advantage they can wish for against us, whether they be inclined to make use of *reason*, or *ridicule* in their attempts to expose us. But they must excuse us, if, to reason, we oppose reason; and to ridicule, ridicule; though to abuse, misrepresentation, or cavilling, we shall oppose nothing; or nothing of a similar nature. *Non tali auxilio*, &c. The laws of our country do not favour us, but the laws of reason, and good breeding regard us and our opponents in the same light, and upon this equal ground will every *fair adversary* meet us.

If this work have no other merit, it will, at least, have that of *books of travels*, written to inform people of the manners and customs of those to whom they were strangers; and it may be presumed, that a faithful account of the *Dissenters* in England, may be as interesting; since it will, at least, be as useful, to Englishmen, as any account of the *Samoeds*, or *Kamtchadales*. And, notwithstanding,



## THE PREFACE. 7

notwithstanding most people may think they know us very well already, I am hardly acquainted with a single person belonging to the established church, with whom I would chuse to rest the cause of the Dissenters, if a defence of their principles and conduct were necessary; and least of all could I depend upon any of them, for a just account of the grounds of Non-conformity peculiar to those who are called *rational* Dissenters.

It will be observed that the following account of the Dissenters doth not include the *Quakers*. Indeed they are a body of men so very distinct from all others, who dissent with them from the established church; and they have so many sentiments, such maxims of conduct, and such a system of policy peculiar to themselves; that when we speak of Dissenters in general, we never mean to comprehend the *Quakers*, but always name them by themselves. In compliance with this custom

tom, I have always used the term *Dissenter* in this restrained sense.

N. B. *For many other observations relating to the subject of this treatise, the author begs leave to refer his readers to his Essay on the first principles of government, his Considerations on church authority, and his Remarks on some paragraphs in Dr. Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, relating to the Dissenters.*

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A VIEW OF THE  
PRINCIPLES AND CONDUCT  
OF THE

Protestant Dissenters.

**D**R. Blackstone having insinuated that *the spirit, the principles, and the practices of the sectaries are not calculated to make men good subjects*; I published remarks upon that, and some other passages in his *Commentaries*, that were particularly offensive to Dissenters. Those remarks were written in such a manner as I thought so injurious, so groundless, and so unreasonable a reflection deserved. The Doctor, in his Reply, has openly disavowed the sentiment, and generously promised to cancel the offensive paragraphs in the future editions of his work. For the sake, however,

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ever, of many others of our fellow citizens, who may entertain the same unfavourable idea of Dissenters; persons to whose good opinion we are by no means indifferent, and whose confidence we would gladly gain, I have been induced to consider the subject seriously and fully.

I WISH there were no occasion for an explanation of this kind: but the Protestant Dissenters in England are a body of men, that are, I believe, very little known to the generality of their countrymen. We sometimes meet with instances, even in genteel life, and among persons of liberal education, of such absolute ignorance of the Dissenters, and of their principles, as afford us great diversion.

SOME members of the established church have expressed their surprise, that we should make use of the same bible with them; and there are numbers who will not admit that we have any right to be called Protestants. Swift, whose knowledge and good sense in some respects, were fully balanced by his ignorance and  
weakness



weakness in others, calls the members of the church of England Protestants, by way of distinction from the Dissenters in Ireland.

A VERY sensible clergyman, an excellent scholar, and a person of a philosophical taste, with whom I was accidentally brought acquainted, and with whom I, afterwards, lived in perfect intimacy, owned to me, that he had no idea of Dissenters being such men as he found them to be. He had thought we were, all of us, such as he had seen exposed in *Hudibras*, that we were all canting hypocrites, the farthest in the world from any thing of a liberal taste or disposition, that we never laughed from generation to generation, and were, to a man, enemies of all regal government. I am glad, therefore, to take this opportunity to endeavour to introduce myself and friends into the acquaintance and esteem of a few more of our fellow-citizens.

I AM sensible, indeed, that the following fair and undisguised account of the principles of the Dissenters, and especially those of them who, by way of distinction, and

sometimes of reproach, are called *rational Dissenters*, will not tend to conciliate the good will of some church-men; but that is not my object. As members of the community at large, we wish for the esteem of all our fellow-citizens; but as professors of a particular species of religion, that appears to us to be true, we are solicitous to procure the approbation of those only whom we think to be judges in the case, those whom we should call well informed and liberal minded. All we wish concerning others is, that they may become well informed and liberal minded too. Till then, their disapprobation, in this respect, is all the compliment they can pay us.

SOME persons, and it is not improbable that Dr. Blackstone may be of that number (see his Reply, p. 13.) may think that the manner in which I have described the sentiments of the rational Dissenters, as opposed to those of the church of England, is a *reviling* of the established church. To this I can only say, that if the serious declaration

declaration of my own sentiments in religion, with that freedom and earnestness, which I think their importance requires, and the occasion prompts, will unavoidably draw that construction, I must submit to it; regretting that, in the laws of my country, there should be a word of so vague a meaning; and regretting still more, that, with the most favourable interpretation, my country should be disgraced with such a law.

WHETHER, in saying what I have done, I should be deemed *a serious and sober-minded, a moderate and conscientious Dissenter*, or not (Reply p. 11. 18.) the reader will determine according to his own particular sentiments and prepossessions. To myself I do not appear to be more warm as *a Dissenter*, than I am in consequence of being *a Christian*. For in those cases in which the greatest warmth is discovered, I apprehend them to be the same thing; i. e. that the sentiments of the Dissenters are *christian*, and those of the Church of England *not christian*.

WITH the most perfect charity for all who differ from me in opinion, and without thinking, with the members of the Church of England, (see the 8th article) that the favour of Almighty God will be denied even to heathens and infidels as such; I think a zeal for the doctrines of christianity, and especially those which have all the importance that matters of speculation can have, highly becoming a christian. And if, as *an oppugner of the doctrine of the trinity*, i. e. of an opinion which, as I conceive, denies the maker of all things the honour and worship that are due to him alone, I must be ranked with *papists*, and *persons of no religion at all* (which, as Dr. Blackstone very ingeniously, and, indeed, very justly says, Reply, p. 14, is *keeping bad company*) be it so. Considering how often human lawgivers have ranked persons of the best character with the greatest malefactors, I shall not be much affected with the disgrace of being disposed of in that manner.

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SECTION I.

**I**T cannot be expected that the Dissenters in England should be one uniform set of men, since, as Dissenters, they agree in nothing but in dissenting from the doctrines and discipline of the established church. But our want of unanimity among ourselves cannot be any matter of reproach. The *Protestants* are still less agreed among themselves, for that term comprehends all who dissent from the church of Rome; and the church of England is to be ranked under it, along with all the particular sects that differ from her: and *christianity* at large is a still more various thing, comprehending the Papists and Protestants, alike, as well as those of the Greek church.

To be as distinct as possible in explaining the principles of the Dissenters, I would observe, in the first place, that we all disclaim

human authority in matters of religion, and by no means admit the claim of the church of England *to decree rites and ceremonies*, so as to make those things necessary to christian communion, which Christ, our only lawgiver, has left indifferent; and least of all do we admit her claim to *authority in controversies of faith*, (see the 20th article) in any sense that can fairly be put upon those words. We believe that the whole of our religion is contained in the New Testament, that it is every man's personal concern to learn his faith and duty from thence, by the diligent use of his own faculties; and we are so far from acquiescing in the decisions of others, contrary to the conviction of our own minds, that we think it our duty to withstand all attempts to impose upon us, in an affair of so much consequence, and boldly to *stand fast in the liberty of the gospel*.

SECONDLY. Dissenters, I believe, are now, also, universally offended at the English *hierarchy*, consisting of orders of men, with titles, and powers, absolutely

lutely unknown in the New Testament; such as Archbishops, Deans, Archdeacons, Prebends, &c. &c. &c. and, more especially, that ecclesiastical persons, as such, should be invested with such great civil power; particularly that the bishops should hold their spiritual courts, and have seats in parliament. These things we apprehend to be essentially contrary to the genius of the religion of Jesus Christ, whose kingdom was not of this world.

THIS difference of rank in the church, and the large revenues annexed to church preferments, we consider as giving scope to a kind of *ambition* utterly unworthy of the character of christian ministers, and tending to unfit them to be examples to their flocks in meekness, humility, and heavenly mindedness.

THE effects of this system we are grieved to see in the apparent worldly mindedness of a great part of the clergy; in the scandalous height to which *pluralities* and *nonresidence* (things so apparently inconsistent

sistent with the proper function of christian ministers) are arrived; in the strong temptation that men are laid under to prevaricate with their consciences, by subscribing to what they do not believe, in order to advance themselves in the church, i. e. in the world; and in the tendency the whole system has to debase that noble independence of mind, which is the glory of the christian ministry; and to degrade that order of men into the tools of court policy. These abuses, we are sorry to see increasing every day, a great part of the clerical duty being now done by curates, many of whom are very indifferently qualified, and as indifferently provided for; while the higher ranks of the clergy roll in wealth, and the bishopricks are visibly tending to absolute secularization.

It will be no surprise to us, after some time, to see all the valuable livings in the kingdom appropriated to maintain the dignity of the younger sons of great families. The very idea of any obligation to support the clerical character may be lost  
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and then it will be no additional scandal, if the revenues of ecclesiastical offices be disposed of like those in the civil departments, even if they be made hereditary; or if some other rule be established, by which they may come into the possession of minors.

THE hardships of the inferior clergy, who, notwithstanding an ample sufficiency in the revenues of the church, are, in many cases, almost wholly subsisted by voluntary contribution, do certainly prompt them to remonstrate. And should they boldly make their complaint, and exhibit a faithful state of their case to the public, we have no doubt but they would obtain redress. All church livings would be reduced to a moderate competency; every minister would then reside; he would do the duty himself, curates would be almost unknown, and the number of the clergy greatly reduced. But so long as the possibility of advancing himself flatters every individual, that *his own grievances* may be of no long continuance, he makes  
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light of, or conceals his sufferings. Instead of complaining, he is only more assiduous in paying his court to his superiors; which, he is sensible, he should do with a very ill grace, and to little purpose, if he should so much as hint at the shameful *inequality* there is in the *provision for the clergy*. This, though it be the source of almost every corruption in the whole system, and therefore should be first rectified, is the cause of the continuance of them all. It seems to be considered as the most sacred part of the sanctuary; and is that, for the sake of which the superior clergy are so extremely attentive to prevent the least alteration, or amendment, in any thing else. If but the extremity of the web be touched, the alarm is felt to the very center. And so, it appears to us, things are likely to remain, till, in some general convulsion of the state, some bold hand, secretly impelled by a vengeful providence, shall sweep down the whole together.

THIRDLY. The first occasion of non-conformity arose from the objections that were

were made to the popish vestments, particularly at the consecration of bishop Hooper; and to other ceremonies of the church of Rome, on account of the superstitious, and hurtful notions they were imagined to convey to the common people; and though some Dissenters are now better reconciled to those habits and ceremonies, than their forefathers were; because, in present times, they are not so liable to be abused; yet Dissenters, I believe, in general, not only object to the authority of imposing things of this nature, but also have an insuperable aversion to the things themselves, on account of the apparent folly and absurdity of them, and their being, some of the most ridiculous remains of the gross and abject superstition of Rome.

WE dislike, particularly, the use of a white surplice, the consecration of churches and church-yards, the sign of the cross in baptism, the use of god-fathers and god-mothers, wheeling about to the East in the recitation of the creed, and bowing at  
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the name of Jesus, together with the posture of kneeling at the celebration of the Lord's supper. These, and other things of the like nature, we see no trace of in the New Testament. We look upon them to have been introduced into the church in barbarous and superstitious ages, without any authority of reason or the scriptures. We see most of them rejected in all other reformed churches, and we think it a disgrace to the good sense and understanding of Englishmen to retain them.

FOURTHLY. Dissenters did not originally object to a *liturgy*, or prescribed *forms of prayer*, as such, though they by no means approved of the conduct of the compilers of the English liturgy, who, instead of framing an intire new one, contented themselves with the offices of the church of Rome, only leaving out such passages as were offensive, and adding responses, to engage the attention of the common people; for till that time they could not join in the public devotions



ons of the church, which were delivered in an unknown tongue. This, however being acknowledged, at that time, to be intended for nothing but a temporary expedient, would have been acquiesced in; but when we see that, excepting a few inconsiderable alterations, made after the restoration, the public liturgy remains at this day (after a period of about two hundred years) in the same crude and immethodical state; we are convinced, that it is extremely inexpedient, and unfavourable to reformation, to have any national liturgy at all; and that our method of *extempore prayer*, as it is generally called, though liable to many objections, is, upon the whole, far preferable. Besides, through the long use of this method, a great number of Dissenters are now zealously attached to it, and could not be induced, by any means, to adopt a prescribed form of prayer; and in this I cannot but approve of their conduct. So that it is not probable that any alteration of the liturgy would now bring any thing like

life so considerable a number of the Dissenters into the church, as such a measure would have done formerly.

FIFTHLY. In these things, I believe, the generality of Dissenters are agreed; but whereas the greater part of those who dissent from the established church still maintain the same general *doctrines*; others of them, and those manifestly increasing in number, and, we apprehend, the most distinguished for learning and freedom of inquiry, are persuaded of the falsity of those religious principles, which the founders of the English establishment deemed to be the most fundamental. We are particularly shocked at the infringement of the great doctrine of the *divine unity* in the Athanasian doctrine of the trinity; whereby Christ and the Holy Spirit are represented as being, each of them, the *true, very, and eternal God*; in manifest contradiction, we apprehend, to the evidence of reason, and the authority of the holy Scriptures; which uniformly ascribe divine honours, exclu-

exclusively of all other persons, to the one God and Father of all, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. More particularly are we shocked at the sentence of everlasting damnation, passed, in the Athanasian creed, upon all persons who do not believe a doctrine, which we think to be so *absurd*, and *impious*, as far, as an opinion can deserve that epithet; and that a great part of the *litany*, and many other prayers of the church, should be addressed to Christ, a practice for which we find no authority, either by command or example, in the only rule of christian faith and duty.

WE think it contrary to reason and the scriptures to maintain, as the Church of England doth, in her 9th article, that by reason of *original*, or *birth sin*, every man is not only, of his own nature, inclined to evil, but deserves God's wrath and damnation; and that all works done before the grace of Christ are of the nature of sin. We also think it is evidently agreeable to the doctrine of the church of England,

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and contrary to reason and the scriptures, that a certain number of mankind are absolutely predestinated to eternal life, while the rest are necessarily excluded from future happiness ; and we think, contrary to the 8th article, that any man may be saved who shall improve the light and opportunity of knowing his duty, with which Divine providence favours him, whether he be a christian or not.

THESE, and other opinions which depend upon them, we look upon to have been corruptions of the genuine doctrines of christianity in very early ages, and which the reformers of the sixteenth century, had not sufficiently examined. Indeed we think they had great merit in reforming as far as they did, and that it is our duty to follow their example, and to second their labours in so good a cause. We even doubt not, but that the general rectification of those errors would quickly have followed the reformation of other abuses, if free inquiry had not been, in a great measure, precluded, and every thing had not



not been prematurely fixed by a coercive establishment.

THE Dissenters are far from being singular in their disbelief of the doctrines of the thirty-nine articles. The most learned and respectable members of the church of England have been foremost in their labours to explode them; and a great majority, we have reason to think, of those who are candid and inquisitive among them, believe as little of what are generally called the *orthodox* opinions as we do. They agree with us in thinking them a disgrace to the established church, and heartily wish that they were *fairly rid of them*; but, as it appears to us, they are either expecting some remedy of those evils, or they have not virtue and strength of mind to abandon a church, which they believe to be so corrupt; and to throw up the emoluments which they received, upon their professing an unfeigned assent and consent to the whole system.

It should, however, be considered (and Dissenters, in general, do this most ex-

cellent and valuable part of the clergy the justice to consider) that the good they now actually do, by continuing in their places, in the assiduous discharge of their ministerial duty, besides being very great, is present and manifest; whereas the prospect they might have of doing good by quitting their employments entirely is less certain, remote, and indistinct; so that a person of the most upright intention, may well be allowed to hesitate about quitting such a certainty for such an uncertainty: and, on this account, many Dissenters approve of their conduct. Others, however, think, that the plain and strict rule of integrity ought never to be departed from on any consideration whatever, not for any *prospect*, or even any *certainty* of doing the greatest good in other respects; that if subscribing to what a man doth not believe be a thing that is wrong in other cases, it must be wrong in this. They also think that the clear consequence of this maxim, is, that it must be wrong in a man to retain any advantage he may enjoy in consequence

quence of having done a thing he would not do again, though he did not disapprove of it at the time ; or to continue in any situation, into which he has introduced himself by means which he should now think unfair.

HAD all the clergy in 1662 acted upon the same principle with the modern reforming clergy, it is evident that the churches would have been better served for some time, and a very great present loss was actually sustained, by the resignation of a great number of clergymen distinguished for learning, integrity, and piety ; but the consequence would have been, that there would have been no non-conformists in England ; so that, in a few generations, the body of the clergy would have sunk into the despicable character of the popish clergy before the reformation ; and, in all future times, the English churches would have been much worse supplied than they are now.

It may also be said, that if Luther, and his contemporaries, had acted upon this

principle, and every clergyman had contented himself, like Erasmus, with doing all the good he could do in his situation, the general reformation would never have taken place. It is upon this principle, also, that Socrates, and other intelligent heathen philosophers, are blamed by christian writers. They, themselves, had pretty just notions of the Deity; but they acquiesced in, and thereby promoted a conformity to the idolatrous system of their country.

It is not pretended, however, but that this worthy and enlightened part of the clergy may have reasons for their conduct, into which Dissenters do not sufficiently enter, and of which they are not competent judges.

A GREAT number of men of sense and free inquiry among the *laity* of the establishment are also convinced that the doctrines of the church are not agreeable to truth; but we apprehend that religious motives have not sufficient weight with them, to engage them either to dissent from the church, or to make any open remonstrance



france on the subject. The example of the clergy in continuing to subscribe what they are generally supposed to disbelieve, and totally to disapprove, we cannot help thinking, is of fatal influence with them.

WE are persuaded that these doctrines of the church, and this practice of the clergy are, in some measure, causes of the *infidelity* that prevails so generally, and which is visibly gaining ground in this country. Men of sense will not believe that many things in the religion of the church of England can be of God; and men of a superficial, and especially of a licentious turn of mind, will not take the pains to look for any other. They also imagine that this is the secret opinion of many of the clergy. They may perhaps *know* it to be so with respect to some of them, of whose understanding they have the best opinion; and their suspicion with respect to the rest will naturally be strengthened, by seeing them so little scrupulous in the business of subscription; when they are persuaded that they cannot believe some

of the things that they profess to believe, If it be only thought that the clergy *prevaricate* in a thing of so solemn a nature, it cannot but have the worst influence.

THE errors above-mentioned we also consider as disfiguring the christian religion in the eyes of Jews, Mahometans, and all the unchristian part of mankind; and as contributing very greatly to prevent the general and happy spread of christianity among all the nations of the world.

IT appears to us that all attempts to convert either the Jews or Mahometans to christianity must be in vain, till they come to understand that the Athanasian doctrine of the trinity is no doctrine of the New Testament: so fundamental with them is the belief of the divine unity, and so fully are they satisfied, that the doctrine of three divine persons is inconsistent with it. In all controversies with those people upon this subject, the christian has no resource but in the incomprehensibility of the divine nature; an argument which, though it may happen to silence an unwary disputant,

tant, can never satisfy any person. See Kemppfer's *Amenitates Exoticæ*, p. 152.

IF it be our *misfortune*, as Dr. Blackstone thinks (Reply p. 10.) to entertain these sentiments, it is a misfortune that, I am afraid, will remain without remedy; and that all our reading and thinking will but tend to confirm us in them. But we Dissenters consider it as our singular privilege, that our situation, how unfavourable soever, in other respects, is favourable to *free inquiry*; and that we have no such bias upon our minds, in favour of established opinions, as is inseparable from such a hierarchy as that of the church of England; the influence of which is so great, that, notwithstanding the founders of it, in the reign of Henry 8th, and more especially under Edward 6th, are well known to have meant to proceed much farther, and only acquiesced in what they then did, as the best reformation that they thought the times would bear, (though, in many respects, far short of what was proposed by Wickliffe a century before)

before), not a single step has been advanced, in the period of about 200 years, that have elapsed since their times and ours; a period in which there has been an almost total revolution in the whole system of thinking in Europe, and which has affected moral and theological subjects as much as any other. Still, however, the old imperfect system is the standard; and the writings of Dr. Blackstone and others convince us, that it will, probably, be the *ne plus ultra*, notwithstanding the assiduous endeavours that have always been made, and still are making, by serious and intelligent members of the church, to promote a farther reformation.

As the most conspicuous part of the Protestant Dissenters in England go by the name of *Presbyterians*, it is generally imagined, by those who are of the established church, that we are the same kind of people with the Presbyterians in Scotland, and that none of us would scruple to conform to their establishment. I rather suspect that Dr. Blackstone is of this opinion

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on, from what he says, Reply, p. 15. But this is a very great mistake, and conveys a reflection that many of us think very injurious to us. Time was, when the supposition would have been nearly just. But at present, since the two establishments do not differ in *doctrines*, but retain the same fundamental, and as we think, antichristian errors, with equal obstinacy, and differ only in *externals* (to the advantage indeed, of the church of Scotland, but in things which we do not now consider as of the first consequence) we look upon them both in nearly the same light; and this, as the reader may perceive, is no very favourable one. We cannot see how a strict unitarian can subscribe the Scotch confession of faith, any more than the thirty-nine articles of the church of England. If he does, it must be, as it appears to us, by the help of some such *expedient*, as would enable him to subscribe the *Koran* in similar circumstances; an expedient which we do not trouble ourselves to inquire about, or to discuss very minutely; being certain, from

from the nature of the thing, that it must be such, as a man under no foreign influence, or a man of strict integrity would not have recourse to,

## SECTION II.

**I**F any person be of opinion that these principles of the Dissenters are calculated to make them bad subjects, I shall desire him calmly to review the account I have now given of them, and particularly those of the *rational Dissenters*, as the most remote from the church of England; and see whether he can pitch upon any of them, that can possibly be conceived to have a bad tendency, with respect to civil government. I shall go over the particulars along with him for this purpose.

In the first place, can it be inferred that because we disclaim all human authority in matters of religion, that we, therefore, disclaim all human authority in civil matters. On the contrary, it might be more fairly presumed, that,  
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since we are conscientious in yielding obedience where we think it is only due, in the one case, and, without fear of men, *render unto God the things that are God's*; that we shall be as conscientious in yielding all due obedience, wherever we profess to yield it, in other cases; and shall, therefore, with the same scrupulosity, *render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's*.

In reality, we Dissenters consider our interest, the laws we are bound by, and the authority we submit to, with respect to the things of *this world*, and those of a *future* to be quite independent of one another. The object of the one is the quiet and comfortable enjoyment of this life; but the object of the other is a state of infinitely superior, and never ending happiness in a life to come. In the one we have to do with, and are dependent upon, *men like ourselves*; whereas, in the other, we have to do with *God only*. Since no power on earth can affect me beyond the grave, why should the powers of this world, or civil governors, pretend to any authority



authority in things that respect my condition there? If they control my conduct by laws that I do not altogether approve, with respect to this life, I nevertheless submit to them, because it is in their power to make me a recompence; and, upon the whole, a state of society is almost universally better than a state of anarchy. But if civil governors take upon them to control my conduct with respect to a future world, I renounce their authority, and adhere to the dictates of my conscience, and the commands of God; because it is not in the power of men to make me any recompence for what I should incur by violating my conscience, and disobeying God.

BUT notwithstanding this, as an inhabitant of this world, I value my life, my liberty, my property, and my ease, as much as any other man; and therefore I shall have as sincere an affection for a system of laws and government that can secure them to me, as any other person whatever. Besides, Protestant Dissenters have

have peculiar reason to be attached to the constitution of England, and the present reigning family, as they enjoy more liberty under them. In the reigns of the Tudors and Stewarts they were harrassed by constant and severe persecutions, and they had no legal security till the revolution. As to the hardships we still lie under by the *corporation and test acts*, notwithstanding I think we are unjustly and injuriously treated in them, I, for my part, am not very sollicitous about them. The author of the *Free Address to Protestant Dissenters as such* hath fully expressed my sentiments upon that, and most other subjects relating to the Dissenters. See p. 28.

It is true that those of us who are called *rational Dissenters* have no legal establishment; but we have been so long tolerated by the mildness of the administration, and the government has had so much experience of the innocence of our tenets, and of our conduct; that, though we should certainly prefer the security of *law*, we think the moderation, the good sense, and

and the *spirit of the times* (which is every where, and every day, growing more favourable to toleration) to be a kind of security, that is nearly as good.

SECONDLY. The objections we have to the different ranks and powers of the officers in the English church cannot surely imply, that we object to the different ranks and powers of magistrates in the state. Because we think that civil power is improperly lodged in the hands of ecclesiasticks, it cannot follow that we think it should be lodged in no hands at all, and that it were better to live in a state of absolute anarchy and confusion.

THIRDLY. I also think that no person can seriously imagine, that the dislike we have to the *ceremonies* of the church of England has any connection with a spirit of disaffection to just civil government. It will hardly be said, that the clergy are more loyal for wearing a surplice, or that the laity are better subjects for having been signed with the cross in baptism, or for the discipline of facing about to the

East, and bowing at the name of Jesus. Nor can I think that our disliking the restraint of a fixed liturgy, or forms of prayer, implies that we wish for a freedom from all restraint of law.

LASTLY, as to the tenets of the *rational Dissenters*, with respect to which the difference between us and the church of England is the most striking, I should think, that, if possible, there was still less tendency in them to make us bad subjects. Can it be imagined that a believer in the *divine unity*, as such, i. e. one who confines his religious worship to the *one only self-existent being*, is necessarily a worse subject, than a person who believes the Athanasian doctrine of the trinity, and pays divine honours to inferior and derived beings? Are we worse men, or worse subjects, for not believing the subjection of the whole human race to everlasting damnation, for a crime, to which, they were not consenting, or any way accessory, and which was committed before they were born? for believing the universality



and impartiality of the Divine Goodness, in not excluding, by an arbitrary decree, any of his offspring from the benefit of his mercy; and that, the favour of God will be extended to all who improve the opportunities they have for knowing and practising their duty, whether they be christians or not?

On the contrary, independent of the truth of our opinions, there is, we think, at first sight, something so generous and liberal in them; they exhibit so pleasing a view of the Divine Being and his attributes, and of the present condition, and future expectations of mankind, as tends to make the man who entertains them more happy in himself, and in every thing about him. The man whose ideas of religion in general, and of the Divine Being in particular, are such, as supply a constant motive to the faithful and chearful discharge of his duty to God, and to all men; and encourage an unbounded confidence in Divine Providence, in all his sufferings for conscience sake; must en-

entertain universal benevolence towards his fellow-creatures, as the offspring of our common parent. Hereby the mind will be, in a great measure, divested of unworthy prejudices, and particular attachments, that tend to bias a man in his conduct towards the different classes and sects of his fellow subjects. He will be a friend to equal laws, and regular government; and will glory in a constitution like that of Great Britain, in which he has the security of law for all his temporal interests, and liberty to pursue, unmolested, whatever he thinks conducive to his infinitely more important, his everlasting interests.

## SECTION III.

**S**UCH are the religious principles of the Protestant Dissenters in England, and such the influence they may be supposed to have, with respect to making us good or bad subjects. If I be asked what are our principles of civil government, I answer that, as Dissenters, we have no peculiar principles of civil government at all. If I may give a negative answer, I believe I may say with truth, that there is not a man among us, who is either an enemy to government in general, or to monarchy in particular. As to our particular opinions concerning the forms of government, it may be sufficient to say, that we are Englishmen, and think with the freedom and diversity peculiar to that character. But to be as explicit as possible, and give all the satisfaction I really

am able to do upon the subject; if the inquiry be concerning our *general principles*, or *biqs* with respect to the limitation of monarchy, and the extension or restriction of the power of the crown; I answer, they may easily be deduced by any person, who shall consider our situation in the commonwealth, and our treatment in it; and who doth not forget that, in other respects, we are men like himself.

THE Dissenters are a body of men who were cruelly oppressed by the court for a long series of years, in which our kings were intent upon extending their prerogative; and a great part of their sufferings were evidently *contrary to law*. Can it be supposed, then, that the Dissenters should be fond of the prerogative; especially if it be considered, that, in all the same period, their enemies and persecutors, the established clergy, almost universally adopted, and inculcated, as the most sacred of all truths, the slavish doctrines of *passive obedience and non-resistance*. Accord-



Accordingly, it appears from history, that the Dissenters have always made an uniform and steady opposition to every extension of the prerogative; while the clergy would have enslaved themselves and the nation.

EVER since the fixed limitation of this monarchy at the revolution, and the legal security given to Dissenters, their whole influence has constantly gone with the court, except in some of the last years of Queen Ann, and in the year 1733, when the *excise bill* was in agitation. On the former of these occasions, the Dissenters were apprehensive of the most imminent danger to the *Protestant succession*, from an administration that was hostile to them; and on the latter they apprehended that the *private liberty of the subject* was invaded, by a court that was friendly to them. In the former case, they appeared not to be intimidated by power, and in the other not to be seduced by favour, to join in measures that tended to endanger the Protestant religion,

or the liberty of their country. On both occasions they were joined by the wise and honest part of the nation, and their conduct is universally approved at this day.

IN the same period, the whole stream of court preferment was hardly sufficient to break the long and riveted attachment of the clergy to their good old friends, the family of the *exiled Stewarts*. I speak known facts. A Dissenter, in all the time I have mentioned, voting against the court, would have been reckoned a prodigy ; and a clergyman, out of the verge and immediate influence of the court, taking the other side, would have appeared almost as extraordinary. The reason was that, in all that period, the Dissenters had perfect confidence in the general integrity of the administration. They neither saw, nor suspected any design, either on their own liberties, or those of the nation. On the contrary, they knew the reigning family to be their friends, and the friends of the constitution ;

tion; and that more favour would have been shewn them, if it had not been for the opposition of the narrow-minded clergy.

WITH respect to the state of political disputes at present, Dissenters are about as much divided as the rest of the nation. Many of them, from the force of an habitual attachment to the present reigning family, abet and patronize the measures of the present ministry, \* and did so more especially before the late vote of the House of Commons in favour of Mr. Luttrell. Till that time, the Dissenters in general were so much friends to peace, and thought themselves so happy in the enjoyment of their religious liberty, that they would have acquiesced, without much complaint, in all the other measures of the administration. But this appeared to be a thing so unprecedented, to be so dangerous to the constitution, and, notwithstanding all they could hear alledged in

\* Written October 1769.

its defence, so evidently to defeat the purpose of the election of members of parliament, which is the very basis of all our liberty, that many of them took the alarm; and at present the Dissenters, I believe, are about as much in opposition to the court as the rest of the nation. But neither those who favour the administration, nor those who join the opposition are influenced by any principles peculiar to Dissenters, or to Dissenters of any particular class or denomination. Facts by no means correspond to any hypothesis of this kind. None of us have any principles of political union, as the Quakers have. We are therefore influenced, in all things of this nature, just as we apprehend the liberty and other interests of our country are affected; and we see these things in as different lights, as other Englishmen.

SOME Dissenters seem to be pretty much of the same opinion with the Quakers, with respect to civil government, and to think that, in all cases, and especially



ally those in which violence is used, or apprehended, they, as christians, have nothing to do to intermeddle. They think that they should *let the dead bury their dead*, and trouble themselves about nothing but their interest, as *citizens of heaven*. But others think that, with the character of christians, we are not (while we are in this world) to forget that we are *men, and members of society*; for the temporal welfare of which we should not only *pray*, but *act*; and, consequently, that we ought not to scruple to risque even our lives, if we have a fair prospect of doing any important service to our brethren of mankind.

A GREAT number of Dissenters, and generally the whole body of Quakers, constantly refuse to enter into any measures to oppose the administration, though they may condemn their conduct ever so much; because they are fearful of giving umbrage to the court, which, without any new law, may certainly distress us all very much. But others think that this is a timidity

midity unworthy of men and of christians; that in this, as in every other case, we should be governed solely by a regard to the duty we owe to our country at large, without being biaſſed by any conſideration of our own ſafety or advantage. They think that men of *principle* ſhould ſhew a fearless integrity in their whole conduct; and being conſtantly intent on the faithful diſcharge of their *duty*, as men, or as citizens, ſhould give themſelves no concern about *conſequences*, which belong not to us, but to God.

If it be conſidered that few Diſſenters are men of large property, or have any connection with the court, it will eaſily be concluded, that their general intereſt muſt be the ſame with that of the middling and lower ranks of the people; i. e. they will be among thoſe who are naturally the moſt apprehenſive of any approach towards arbitrary power. Diſſenting miniſters being dependent upon the people, their influence will lean the ſame way. It is by the ſame obvious method  
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of reasoning, that the general attachment of the clergy to the court, and to arbitrary measures of government, may be deduced, viz. from their situation.

THERE are some who imagine, that, because Dissenters acknowledge no visible head in religious matters, but, in general, every individual has an equal voice in all their proceedings, they must have contracted a fondness for equality, and republican maxims in the state. Even historians and philosophers have adopted, and inculcated these sentiments. But if they had given themselves time to reflect, they would have found, that neither reason nor experience give any countenance to the supposition.

NOTHING is more common than to see the same persons governed by different, and even contrary maxims, in different cases; since different ends must be gained by different means. Is not every Englishman accustomed to absolute independence with respect to medicine, and education, and, indeed, almost every thing except govern-

government; and yet thousands of men; who would be fired with indignation at any attempt to control their choice of a physician, or of a tutor to their children, never think about having any vote at all in affairs of state, where they may be as nearly concerned.

IN all our clubs, and societies of every kind, which take up so much of the time and attention of most Englishmen, we all enjoy, and strenuously maintain a perfect *equality of power*; and yet, though this idea occurs a thousand times in this way, for once that it is presented through the medium of religion; and though these customs be of a civil nature, and bear a considerable resemblance to civil government, it is not found, that they have any tendency to make us disaffected to monarchy in the state.

BESIDES, it should be considered, that though Dissenters have no *visible head*, they do acknowledge themselves to be subject to one head, and one to whom they



they profess implicit obedience, even their only lawgiver Jesus Christ.

IF we look into history, it will inform us, that the modes of civil and ecclesiastical government have by no means so close a connection, as some have imagined. We see Denmark in absolute subjection to their prince in temporal things, without professing that obedience to their bishops in spiritual things, that is claimed by the order of the same name in this country. And, on the other hand, many of the Swiss cantons, under the severest spiritual tyranny, are as jealous, as any nation under the sun, of their civil liberty; and they have long maintained, and, in all probability, will long maintain, republican forms of government.

IN all the fluctuations of government that Sweden has undergone, there has never been any change in their ecclesiastical government; nor doth this part of their constitution seem to have had the least influence with respect to the changes in the other.

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To come nearer home. Is not George III. as much King of Scotland, where there are no bishops, as he is of England, where there are ; and are not the Scots as loyal as the English ? At present, I believe, it is generally supposed that they are more so.

THE greatest part of this popular prejudice against the Dissenters seems to have taken its rise from a single fact, the joint fall of the English church and monarchy at the death of Charles I. without considering the peculiar circumstances that contributed to the overthrow of them both. But does it become philosophers to build an hypothesis on a single fact, contradicted by numberless other facts ?

WHATEVER truth there might appear to be in the maxim, *No bishop no king*, in former times ; I make no question but that, at present, monarchical government would stand as firm without that order of men in England, as it doth in Scotland. The danger that would attend the abolition of the ecclesiastical system in England, would  
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arise from the confusion that always attends changes of importance, in things long established, together with the difficulty of separating things that have long been connected and intermixed, and from no other source whatever. Besides, it is not probable that the attachment of the laity, either to the civil, or the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of bishops, in this country, is so great as it has been.

ALL the real weight there is in the preceding supposition, is that the religious system of the Dissenters is unfriendly to arbitrary government in any form, but favourable to liberty in general. But all that is desirable of this, as most Dissenters think, is better secured in a limited monarchy, than in any republican form of government whatever.

IF, after considering in what light Dissenters regard the constitution of this country in civil affairs, I be asked, in what light they consider the established church, my answer may be easily collect-

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ed from what I have already advanced. I shall here sum up the whole with the utmost frankness

WE consider the church of England, as it was constituted by Henry VIII. to have been little more than a transferring of the supremacy in the church from the pope to himself. Under Edward VI. it was a real reformation, as far as the truly excellent promoters of it thought to be then expedient, and as much as they imagined the times would bear; but under Queen Elizabeth, and from thence to the present times, we think that the ecclesiastical constitution of this country has been more unfavourable to religious liberty. All intention of making any farther improvement is, to all appearance, entirely dropped; and the schemes of the ruling powers, in church and state, seem to be, to make no more alteration with respect to themselves, or concession with respect to Dissenters, than they can possibly help.



As *friends to our country*, we consider the civil power that is annexed to ecclesiastical offices as a great impropriety in itself, an evident imperfection in the constitution, and what is actually attended with considerable inconvenience in the state; and we consider the dependence of so great a number of the clergy upon the court, (men whose situation in the commonwealth gives them the greatest possible influence) to be manifestly unfavourable to liberty; and we think that the effects of it are not sufficiently counteracted by any other provision in this free constitution.

As the *friends of religion*, and of the christianity of the New Testament, we are sorry to see provision made for the continuance of many gross errors in doctrine, and many foolish, and even hurtful superstitions in practice.

As the *friends of virtue*, we are shocked at the prospect of the strong temptation, which the ecclesiastical establishment of this country holds out to the clergy, to

prevaricate with their consciences, by inducing them to subscribe what they do not believe; an evil which must grow every day more general and dreadful; as, through the encreasing light of the age, it cannot be, but that more thinking and serious persons must object to the doctrines of the church, and dislike the rites of it. We also think, that when the laity in general shall understand how little scrupulous the clergy are, in an affair in which conscience, morality, and religion are so nearly concerned, they cannot but be affected, in a manner that will be greatly to the prejudice of the whole body of the clergy, and of religion and virtue too.

LASTLY, as the *friends of learning*, we are sorry to see the ample revenues of the two universities, which are a kind of *appendage* to the ecclesiastical constitution of this country (especially as the taking of degrees in them is clogged with a subscription to the 39 articles) applied in a manner

manner so little favourable to the real interests of science, when the Scotch universities, with very trifling funds, are so admirably constituted, and are so evidently superior to them, both in their general plan of provision for instruction, and in their real utility. The revenues of either of the universities would be sufficient to found several, each of which might do much more good than they both do at present.

THE Dissenters are very far from entertaining any aversion to the clergy of the established church. We have the highest respect, and even veneration for a great number of them, who are intent upon the faithful discharge of their ministerial duty, who lament the manifest imperfections of their ecclesiastical system, and are incessantly moving for some reformation; though without any effect, except its being attended with the consciousness of doing their own duty by the attempt. But we cannot help thinking that the in-

fluence of the hierarchical system upon others of the clergy is great and fatal, in rendering them wordly-minded, careless of their ministerial duty, and criminally obsequious to those who are in power.

As men of letters, we make no distinction of clergy or laity, Christians, Jews, Mahometans, or Heathens. In company with philosophers it shall not be known what our religious sentiments are; but if, without our guiding it, the conversation should turn upon that subject; it might appear, that, together with a taste for the liberal arts, we are also zealous Christians, steady Protestants, and warm Dissenters.

DISSENTERS in general are by no means enemies to ecclesiastical establishments, as such. They would cheerfully contribute to the support of one, provided it were upon a broad bottom, that it were accompanied with a toleration of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting with  
perfect



perfect freedom, in matters of religion, for all that chose to dissent from it; and that it were favourable to religion, liberty, and learning; more especially if the constitution of it were such, as would admit of improvements, whenever there should be a general conviction of their necessity or utility. Such an establishment as this would comprehend a very great part of the Dissenters, and those who would not chuse to join it, would treat it with respect and friendship.

THE establishment, in its present state, gives them no offence, any farther than the concern they have for the good of their country induces them to wish for a reformation of it. The Dissenters in general are so well satisfied with their present situation, that they can hardly be said to wish for any alteration in it, that the government can effect for them. They are glad to purchase their religious liberty by their exclusion from civil offices, by the support of their own minis-

ters, and contributing their full share towards the maintenance of those of the establishment. Taking the whole of the constitution together, there are no members of the community who know it better, who value it more, or who would risque more for the support of it,

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## SECTION IV.

**T**O vindicate a whole body of men, and especially persecuted men, in the whole course of their history, is a task that no man in his senses will ever undertake. All men, and all bodies of men are both liable to offend, and have offended; and *oppression will make even a wise man mad*. No wonder then, if the *Puritans*, whom we may call our ancestors, were sometimes transported beyond the bounds of moderation, in the long course of severe persecution they underwent. It will not be easy, however, to name any other set of men, in circumstances similar to theirs, whose conduct has been more unexceptionable. With the foibles of men, history shews, that they had the meekness of christians, together with the generosity and magnanimity of heroes.

MANY persons think it must have been

been a mark, either of great weakness of mind, or of a restless and seditious temper, in the old Puritans, to make so violent an opposition to the injunction of a few ceremonies, acknowledged not to be sinful in themselves. As I apprehend that the sentiments and conduct of our ancestors are generally misunderstood in these respects, I shall consider both these charges distinctly.

THAT they were men of *weak minds* seems to be so much taken for granted, that every indulgence that hath been shewn them is always considered, as made in favour of *tender consciences*; a term which I believe generally, though by no means justly, conveys that idea. But when the conduct of the first Non-conformists is set in its proper light, it is apprehended, that it will appear to have been an argument of great *strength of mind*; and that they will be seen to have acted upon more just and enlarged views of things, than those who superciliously affect to stigmatize them in this manner.

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IT should be considered, that a *power of decreeing rites and ceremonies* is a power absolutely indefinite, and of the very same kind with those claims, which, in things of a civil nature, always give the greatest alarm. A tax of a penny is a trifle; but a power of imposing that tax is never considered as a trifle, because it may imply absolute servitude in all who submit to it. In like manner, the enjoining of the posture of kneeling at the Lord's supper is not a thing worth disputing about in itself, but the authority of enjoining it is; because it is, in fact, a power of making the christian religion as burdensome as the Jewish, and a power that has actually been carried to that length in the church of Rome. Nor do we see any consistence in the church of England rejecting the authority of Rome in these things, and imposing her own upon us.

AFTER submitting to kneel at the Lord's supper, who could object to any of the fopperies of the mass, enjoined by  
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the same authority? It is plain, also, that the power which appoints a fast of forty days, might confine us to *soupe meagre* all the year round.

BESIDES, the mischief of submitting to the imposition of ceremonies doth not terminate with the loss of religious liberty. The common people, being used to consider the observance of other things, as their duty to God, as well as these of a moral nature, will soon begin to think the neglect of some duties, which they may find it more difficult for them to observe, may be compounded for, by an attention to others, which are more easy; and thus the whole practice of religion may be reduced to mere *bodily exercise*, as is almost altogether the case in the church of Rome, and, we think, too much so in the church of England.

EXTERNAL observances have, also, this to recommend them, that they are of a precise and definite nature, so that it may be easily known when they have been complied with, and thereby the conscience

ence may be entirely discharged, and at ease; whereas moral duties are, necessarily, of a less definite nature, so that a man cannot attain to the same perfect satisfaction of mind with respect to them.

It is by no means from theory only, and this reasoning *a priori*, that we dread the introduction of ceremonies, or the power to enjoin them. We see the more reason to withstand the imposition of them, when we consider how exceedingly prone mankind have always *in fact* been, to indulge a licentious imagination in devising and diversifying ceremonies. Witness the above-mentioned foppery and parade of the *mass*, as it is exhibited in popish countries, the description of which would almost make a volume. Yet, as if all this were not sufficient, the Jesuits in Paraguay have found room to make a very copious and splendid addition.

As the account that Charlevoix gives of these additional ceremonies is very curious, and as it fully confirms what I have said, of the boundless exuberance of the human

human imagination in things of this nature, and thereby supplies a strong argument for an early and vigorous opposition to them, I shall recite the whole passage at full length.

‘BUT nothing can compare with the procession of the blessed sacrament; and it may be affirmed, that without any display of riches or magnificence, it forms a sight, which yields, in nothing, to the richest and most magnificent procession in any other part of the world. Don Antonio de Ulloa inform us, in general, that it is attended with very fine dancing, far above what is to be seen in the province of Quito; that the dancers are very neatly-dressed; and that the pomp of it, upon the whole, equals that of the greatest cities, at the same time that infinitely more decency and devotion accompanies it. I said, that no treasures were to be seen at this ceremony; but all the beauties of simple nature are there so happily disposed as to represent her in all her glory. She even appears, if I may say so, all life and  
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soul on the occasion; for, over the greens and flowers that compose the triumphal arches, under which the blessed sacrament passes, there appear flocks of birds of every colour, tied by the legs to strings of such a length, that a stranger would imagine they enjoyed their full liberty, and were come of their own accord to mix their warblings with the voices of the musicians, and the rest of the people; and bless, in their own way, him, whose providence carefully supplies all their wants.

ALL the streets are hung with carpets very well wrought, and separated by garlands, festoons and compartments of verdure, disposed with the most beautiful symmetry. From distance to distance, there appear lions and tigers very well chained, that they may not disturb the solemnity instead of adorning it; and even very fine fishes sporting and playing in large basons of water. In a word, every species of living creatures assist at the solemnity, as it were, by their deputies, to  
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do homage to the incarnate word, in his august sacrament ; and acknowledge the sovereign dominion his father has given him over all living creatures. Wherever the procession passes, the ground is covered with mats, and strewed with flowers and odoriferous herbs. All, even the smallest children, have a hand in these decorations, amongst which are, likewise, to be seen the flesh of the animals newly killed for food ; every thing the Indians regale themselves with at their greatest rejoicings ; and the first fruits of their labours ; all, in order to make an offering of them to the Lord ; the grain, particularly, they intend to sow, that he may give it a blessing. The warbling of the birds, the roaring of the lions and tigers, the voices of the musicians, the plain chant of the choir, all intermix without confusion, and conspire to form a concert not to be equalled in any other part of the world.

‘ THE great royal standard is carried behind the blessed sacrament. The cacique,

cique, the corregidor, the regidores, and the alcaldes, support the canopy. The militia, both horse and foot, with their colours and standards flying, assist, likewise, at the procession in good order. But, however striking this spectacle may be, the greatest beauty of it, beyond all manner of doubt consists in the piety, the modesty, the respect, and even the air of holiness, visible in every countenance; so that, perhaps, the triumph of the Saviour of mankind is no where more compleat than in this barbarous country, where his name was not known two ages ago. As soon as the blessed sacrament is returned to the church, the Indians present to the missionaries all the several kinds of eatables that have been exposed in the procession; and the fathers, after sending the best of every thing to the sick, distribute what remains among the rest of the inhabitants. The evening, as on all other great solemnities and days of publick rejoicing, concludes with the most curious fire works.\* See Vol. 1st. p. 286, &c.

STRANGE and whimsical as these ceremonies appear, they are such as no person, who (with the members of the church of England) acknowledges a power in men to decree rites and ceremonies at all, could possibly object to, the things not being sinful in themselves. A successful opposition should have been made long before such extravagancies were proposed, and not so much to the things themselves, as to the power of imposing them.

WHEN these things are duly considered, it will appear, that our ancestors, the old Puritans, had the same merit in opposing the imposition of the surplice, that Hampden had in opposing the levying of ship money. In neither case was it only the thing itself they objected to, but also the authority that enjoined it, and the danger of the precedent. And it appears to us, that the man who is as tenacious of his *religious*, as he is of his *civil liberty*, will oppose them both with equal firmness.

ALL the difference, then, in the conduct



duct of men, who equally value their liberty, will be in the *time* and *manner* of opposing incroachments upon it. The man of a strong and enlarged mind will always oppose these things in the beginning, when only the resistance can have any effect; but the weak, the timid, and short sighted, will attempt nothing till the chains are riveted, and resistance is too late. In civil matters, the former will make his stand at the levying of the first penny by *improper authority*; and in matters of religion, at the first, though the most trifling ceremony, that is, without reason, made necessary; whereas the latter will wait till the load, in both cases, is become too heavy to be either supported, or thrown off.

To vindicate the Non-conformists from the charge of *sedition*, a short view of their history will be necessary.

THE difference between the conformists and Non-conformists began among the Protestant exiles during the persecution of Queen Mary; so that the difference can

hardly be said to have existed in England during her reign.

QUEEN Elizabeth, a woman fond of power, and fond of pomp, conceived a violent aversion to the Non-conformists. They were not only persecuted in the courts of the bishops, and the High Commission court, during the whole of her reign; but the transferring of the supremacy, in matters of religion, from the pope to the king, having united the church and state into one body, writing against the church was construed, by the judges in Westminster hall, to be a seditious libelling of the Queen's government; and was punished with exorbitant fines, imprisonment, and death. Yet no historian can say that the Puritans of those times made the least attempt to disturb the civil government.

UPON the accession of king James, they conceived some hopes, from a prince who, when he was in Scotland, had boasted that he was a *Protestant of the purest kirk upon earth*; but they found themselves grossly deceived in him. Instead of being  
a friend

a friend to them, he proved the most inveterate of enemies, and put all the springs of prerogative in motion to distress and reduce them; but, instead of accomplishing his designs, the number of Puritans increased prodigiously in his reign; owing, chiefly, to their standing firm by the constitution and laws of their country, and to their pious and severe manner of life. These principles, and this conduct, secured them the friendship and esteem of all the sober and thinking part of the nation; while the papists, and court divines, were always for advancing the prerogative. Things continuing in this channel till the breaking out of the civil wars, the whole nation, in a manner, no longer able to bear the incroachments of the crown, on their fundamental rights and liberties, turned Puritan.

IN all these reigns, in which the Puritans were frowned upon by the court, they did nothing that could be called seditious. They made use of no other weapons, during a course of fourscore

years persecution, but prayer to God, and petitions to the legislature for the redress of their grievances; it being an article of their belief (as sufficiently appears by their protestations in the beginning of the reign of James I.) that absolute submission was due to the supreme magistrate, in all things lawful.

At the opening of the long parliament, the Puritans, and the nation in general, would have been content with a *limited episcopacy*, till the Scots coming in with their *solemn league and covenant*, they were induced to join with them; and from that time they made a point of establishing the Presbyterian government in its full extent. The Presbyterians gaining the ascendancy, in the violent struggle that ensued between the two parties, they certainly dealt hard measure to some of their opponents; and would have persecuted with more violence, if they had not been restrained by the Independents, who were at the head of the army. However, the number of the clergy who suffered purely on account of religion in those



those times was by no means so considerable, as it has been sometimes represented.

It should be considered, in extenuation of the crime of persecution, in those times, both among the Conformists and Non-conformists, that the true principles of religious liberty were by no means understood; since they all thought, that the civil magistrate was intrusted with the guardianship of the church, and that he had a right to punish men for opinions that were *truly heretical*. This consideration would exculpate them entirely, in my opinion, had they been actuated by no other motive than a concern for religion, and the glory of God. But I apprehend, that no case of persecution can be mentioned, in which it is not more than probable, that other motives, of a very different nature, mixed with those, and were the true cause of the violence with which it was carried on. In the sufferings of the Protestants and Non-conformists, it is evident, from numberless

circumstances, that the persecution was carried on, not with the spirit of christians, but with that of men, or rather, in some cases, with that of demons.

NOTWITHSTANDING the severe hardships the Puritans had suffered in the former reigns, the Presbyterians, who, in number, far exceeded all the other sects, were still friends to the old constitution of their country, to monarchy, and even the reigning family. Their whole influence was exerted to prevent the death of the king; an event which they looked upon with horror, and which is yet condemned by almost all their posterity; notwithstanding a few of them, from considerations of policy, and not from any principles belonging to them as Dissenters, think the fact may be justified, though not the manner of it.

WITHOUT the concurrence of the Presbyterians, it would have been in vain for general Monk, or any other Royalist, to have attempted the restoration; and they were so eager to accomplish it, that  
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they even surrendered at discretion. Having more of the *innocence of the dove*, than of the *prudence of the serpent*, they parted with their power on no other security than the royal word; and that profligate and arbitrary prince, Charles II. no sooner got into the throne, than the haste he made to violate his promise exceeded all the rules of decency, as well as of honour. The terms of conformity were immediately made narrower, and more exceptionable, than they had been before the civil wars; the penal laws were rigorously executed, and new ones framed, almost every sessions of parliament, for several years together.

By the horrid act of uniformity, passed in the 14th of this reign, about two thousand ministers were driven from their preferments in the church. Among them were many persons distinguished for their abilities and zeal. This was an example of severity, to which there can hardly be found a parallel in the history of the whole christian world. At the reformation from  
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popery by Queen Elizabeth, there were not above two hundred ministers deprived of their livings. Besides, they were treated with great mildness, and had some allowance for their support out of their former stipends; whereas these Non-conformists were treated with the utmost severity, and cast entirely upon Divine Providence for a supply. They were driven from their houses, from the society of their friends, and (what they valued more) from their usefulness; though they had merited much of the king, and had laboured indefatigably for his restoration.

How much the Dissenters were influenced by a regard to religion and liberty, and how much they suffered in consequence of it, is evident from the history of the *test act*, passed in this reign. This act was levelled against the Duke of York, and other papists; and when the court opposed it, on the pretence that some regard should be shewn to the Protestant Dissenters, the Dissenters themselves moved, that, since the act was likely to prove so  
great



great a barrier against popery, it might pass without alteration; being willing to lie under the severity of this law for a time, rather than retard a work of so much consequence to their country: and under the severity of this law their posterity still lie, and, in all probability, will continue to do so, as long as the hierarchy shall subsist.

By the rigorous execution of the many acts passed in this reign to repress the Non-conformists, great numbers of conscientious persons were reduced to extreme distress and misery, or compelled to worship God in a manner that was contrary to the dictates of their consciences, under the penalty of heavy fines, or of being shut up in prison with thieves and robbers. A great number retired to the plantations in North America, and yet it is computed that 3800 Protestant Dissenters perished in prison during this reign.

In the reign of James II. the bishops, finding their own system in danger, courted the assistance of the Non-conformists, whom

whom they had been persecuting and destroying for so many years. They were at the same time caressed by the king; but they took no advantage of that disposition of the court, to make reprisals on their adversaries. The dissenting ministers, assembled in London, would not acknowledge *the king's dispensing power*; and though Dissenters of several denominations, pleased with the prospect of liberty after so long oppression, did address his Majesty on that occasion, and in higher strains than their elder and more cautious ministers approved; bishop Burnet admits, that few concurred in these addresses, and that the persons who presented them were mean and inconsiderable. Mr. Coke, says, that, to his knowledge, the Dissenters both dreaded, and detested the dispensing power; and that their steadiness in this crisis was a noble stand, to be made by a number of men who subsisted only by the royal favour. But they chose to trust their liberties to the mercy of their Protestant brethren,

rather

rather than enjoy it under a Popish government. Mr. Echard says, that the Dissenters shewed an unusual readiness to join with the church against the common enemy. Their obstinacy provoked the king to say, that the *Dissenters were an ill natured sort of people, that could not be gained.*

UPON the accession of king William and queen Mary, to which the Dissenters most heartily contributed, the famous *act of toleration* was passed; but the established clergy so far forgot their obligations to the Dissenters, and their repeated promises of favour, that when a bill was proposed for the comprehension of the Dissenters in the church, and an ecclesiastical commission was appointed to prepare matters for it; the lower house of convocation, in which was a majority of high church men, resolved not to enter into any debate about alterations. This was the second time that the church of England was rescued out of the most im-

minent danger, by men, for whose satisfaction they would not abate a ceremony.

It was for the steady adherence of the Dissenters to the Protestant succession in the house of Hanover, that the *schism bill* was passed, and other hardships were put upon them by the Tory ministry, in the latter end of the reign of Queen Ann, and not for their differing from the church. For it is well known, that if they would have joined the court interest they might have made better terms for themselves. This will hardly be doubted, when it is considered, that Lord Bolingbroke, an unbeliever in all religion, had the lead in the administration at that time. But as long as there is a Protestant Dissenter in England, there will be a firm and intrepid friend to the Protestant succession, to the liberty, and to the present happy constitution of this country; and with all those who value these great objects, the Dissenters will always have merit.

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## SECTION V.

**T**HERE are many persons, I believe, who are of opinion, that all peaceable Dissenters from the establishment ought to be tolerated; that it is cruel and unreasonable, not to permit all mankind to worship their Maker in the manner that they think will be most acceptable to him; and the good sense and philosophy of modern times have contributed to explode all persecution for conscience sake. In good policy, also, these violent measures are found to be imprudent, and ruinous to a state. But still they look upon this indulgence as a *necessary evil*, and think it would be much better, if there were no Dissenters, and if all the members of the same community were agreed in their religious sentiments, and form of worship.

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MANY of the Dissenters are of a very different opinion. We think it is greatly for the advantage, both of religion, and the society, that no obstruction be thrown in the way, either of *forming* new sects, or of *continuing* the old ones. We think it is best, that there be no provision to promote uniformity in matters of religion, except a perfect *freedom of inquiry*; in consequence of which, it may, perhaps, be possible, that, in some remote period, one set of religious sentiments, and one method of conducting public worship, shall be approved and adopted by all. In the mean time, every other method of promoting uniformity must necessarily be in favour of error; unless it be maintained, that the civil magistrate, who makes this provision, is an infallible judge of religious truth. For our part, we have seen but little reason to form a very great opinion of the capacity of civil magistrates for judging in these matters.

THE benefits accruing to a state from a multiplicity of sects are extremely obvious.

ous. Among persons of different professions, there will always be emulation. The consequence of which will be, that both the points in debate, and also the subject of religion in general, will be more studied, and better understood. If the disputants come to no agreement in opinion, they will, all of them, have an opportunity of acquiring the divine principle of *universal charity*, with respect to those that differ from them; and some of them will, no doubt, attain to it; though others, it may be expected, will continue slaves to the lowest prejudices, and, through a fond imagination, may suppose the favour of Almighty God confined to themselves.

DIFFERENT sects in religion will also be a check upon one another with respect to decency, and propriety of conduct, and diligence in the performance of ministerial duty. A multitude of facts confirm this observation. In the state of Europe, it is evident, that where the clergy are under no restraint from the obser-

vation and censure of others, emulation among themselves has but little effect; and that they are, in general, exceedingly ignorant, lazy, and profligate. There is no person acquainted with history, and who makes any reflection upon what he reads; but must be convinced, that the reformation in the 16th century was of unspeakable service to those countries that continued to profess the popish religion, and that it has operated in the manner that I describe. The same person, if he think at all, must be sensible, that the Dissenters in England do the same service to this country, and the clergy of it; for human nature is the same every where: and what are the clergy of all denominations, but men of like passions with other men?

To make my reader a better judge of the influence of the Dissenters, in this country, I shall enter into a few more particulars concerning them.

THE present race of Dissenters have little, or nothing, of that stiffness and rusticity



city of behaviour,\* for which their ancestors are generally, though not altogether justly, supposed to have been distinguished. With a moderate share of wealth, they are by no means deficient in the politeness of modern times; and we apprehend that their ministers, though, in general, inferior to the clergy of the established church in *classical* knowledge, are not inferior to them in *philosophical* knowledge, and are probably superior to them with respect to *theology*, and an acquaintance with the scriptures.

THIS is owing chiefly to the circumstance of our being the *inferior* party, and to the necessity that, in this situation, we are under to distinguish ourselves, in order that, without the advantage of numbers, we may appear in a respectable light in the community.

BESIDES, it may well be supposed, that all the *unthinking* part of the nation will in general go with the establishment, whatever it be. No body is ever asked a reason why he goes to church. Any person

would be thought impertinent, who should seem to expect a reason in this case. The members of the established church, therefore, have no occasion to trouble themselves about the reasons of their conduct; but Dissenters are often in the way of discourses upon that subject; so that they cannot help giving some degree of attention to it, and also to every other subject of religious controversy. Children and young persons among us are exposed to the insults of their companions who go to church; which rouses their faculties, and puts them upon inquiry, that they may have something to reply, when they are attacked upon the subject of religion. In this situation our youth can hardly help getting a taste for reading. And I think it is evidently fact, that Dissenters in general are not possessed of less knowledge than churchmen of the same class and rank in life. It is rather probable, that they are possessed of more.

\* **DISSENTING** ministers are much more carefully educated than the generality of cler-

clergymen. And not only are they obliged to study the subject of religion more closely ; but, if the constitution of our seminaries of learning be attended to, it will appear, that the business of education with respect to those who are designed for the ministry, is much more extensive and liberal among us. The method in which clergymen are educated at the English universities is, certainly less adapted to make them *divines* than the discipline and course of study provided for Dissenters; besides that many of our students, after attending the usual time at our English academies, finish their studies at Edinburgh, or Glasgow.

DISSENTING ministers, are also, in a manner, obliged to use their own prayers, and to make their own sermons; which makes reading, thinking, and composing necessary and habitual to them; whereas it is very possible for a clergyman to go through his duty, without particular observation or censure, if he can do little more than read, and be able to acquit himself with tolerable propriety in common conversation.

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BESIDES, Dissenting ministers are under much more restraint with respect to decency and strictness of behaviour. Levities, that are hardly noticed in clergymen, would be the cause of expulsion to many dissenting ministers. In this situation, not being at liberty to indulge themselves in the fashionable pleasures and dissipation of the age, they are under a necessity of having recourse to reading and study. In this manner a considerable number of them, a number much greater in proportion, than of the clergy, acquire a habit of severe application to study, so as to have no taste for any other method of spending their time.

A SET of men, thus formed by their education, and manner of life, cannot but be of service in the community, especially with respect to the clergy, and the state of literature in general.

It must be owned, however, that the moderation of the present age has occasioned a very great change in the manners, and peculiar distinctions of the Dissenters.

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As the politeness of the times prevents all well bred people from offending one another, by introducing any conversation upon topicks on which they differ, the present race of Dissenters are by no means so well versed, as their ancestors were, in the grounds of Non-conformity; and with respect to reading and knowledge of every kind, they are sinking fast to a level with the members of the established church.

THE consequence of a free and easy intercourse between Dissenters and churchmen is likely to prove much more fatal to the Dissenting interest, than all the persecution they underwent in former times. The decrease of *bigotry* has been attended with a decrease of *just zeal*. The rational Dissenters, being more free from bigotry, have, in general, the least zeal; and though it be evident, that they have the most reason to dissent from the church of England, yet they attend to these reasons so very little, that they have hardly any weight on their minds, or any influence

influence on their conduct; so that, in many cases, the most trifling inducements in the world are sufficient to carry them into the church. But those who act in this manner are, evidently, persons with whom religious motives in general have little weight; so that their leaving us is only a loss of numbers and wealth, and by no means of just reputation.

DISSENTING ministers, also, and especially those of the rational part of them, have lost almost all their preciseness and strictness of behaviour, and are hardly to be distinguished from the more decent clergymen. Still, however, nothing approaching to immorality would be allowed in them; and with respect both to polite literature, and all the branches of useful science, as well as theological knowledge, they have greatly the advantage of their ancestors, and of the Dissenters of the other persuasion; and they are distinguishing themselves more every day. Yet, in consequence of mixing more with

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the world at large, Dissenting ministers of this stamp often come to lay but little stress on the peculiar principles of Non-conformity; and the few that *are* tempted, with the prospect of advancing themselves, to conform to the established church, are almost intirely of this class; but as it is not pretended that their opinions in matters of religion are changed, no person can be at a loss what *kind* of conformity it must have been. It is the reputation of the *men*, and not that of the cause, that is brought into question by those conversions.

It is hoped that, when all that has been advanced in this treatise, and the view here given of the principles and past history of the Dissenters, have been attentively considered; it will appear to the candid and unprejudiced, that the conduct of the governors of this country, with respect to our ancestors, was unjust, ungenerous, and indefensible; and that the present race of Dissenters, though

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many of them have departed farther from the religious principles of the established church, are by no means enemies to civil government in general, or to the constitution of this country in particular ; but that their principles and behaviour are such, as intitle them to the full confidence of their fellow-citizens ; and that it would be just, wise, and (considering the long prevalence of popular prejudices) magnanimous, in the British legislature, to deliver them from the terror of those penal laws, which are so great a reflection on the humanity and good sense of those who continue them in force, as well as make an opprobrious distinction, among the members of the same community, and imply a most unjust suspicion of the loyalty of those who are exposed to the severity of them,

IN the mean time, the consideration of the hardships we lie under, is far from making us forgetful of, or unthankful for the privileges we enjoy, though under the humiliating idea of a *toleration* ; and so long as the mildness of the administration



tion screens us from the heavy penalties to which we are exposed, I believe we shall give the government very little trouble with our remonstrances about our *negative* punishments. And should the storm of persecution return, with its former violence, we had rather be among those against whom it is directed, than among those who direct it.

It is hoped, also, that the advantages attending the continuance, and respectable figure of the Dissenting interest will appear, from the preceding representation, to be so considerable, that every friend of religion, of learning, and of the constitution of his country, will be a friend to the Protestant Dissenters in England; and, in order that they may more effectually subserve those valuable purposes, he will rather wish that their numbers were increased, than diminished.

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